

ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY

FINDING A CRITICAL SPACE: PRACTICAL THEOLOGY, HISTORY,  
AND EXPERIENCE

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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY  
ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF ARTS, LAW, AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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This submission for a PhD by Published Work contains a selection of my published work from the period 2002-2012. The submission demonstrates my contribution in the field of practical theology to the quest to find a critical space in the dialectic between tradition and experience. The motor of my work has been the varied character of my context, and the discovery within that context of critical spaces to reflect upon its diversity. The publications are divided into three groups. The first outlines and explores the features of this foundational dialectic, with particular emphases on feminist theology and on the Bible. The second discusses and disseminates my pioneering work in developing the Professional Doctorate in Practical Theology, through a pedagogy in which this dialectic is illuminated. The work on the Professional Doctorate programme, which began in 2003 with the first student intake in 2006, constitutes the professional and practical context in which the majority of the publications submitted have been written. The third group of publications identifies the contribution which my research on John Ruskin's interpretation of the Bible makes to our understanding of Ruskin and to the discipline of practical theology. The work on Ruskin includes the discovery and discussion of unpublished lectionary annotations and diary material, and analysis of these, both in order to demonstrate the ongoing significance of the Bible to Ruskin, and to understand and categorise Ruskin's biblical interpretation. Ruskin offers an analogue to the contemporary dialectic between experience and text/tradition/Bible. Through this exploration an innovative argument is made for the use of an historical figure in the work of practical theology. Conceptualising the pedagogical philosophy and practice of the Professional Doctorate is inextricably entwined with the research on Ruskin, and together they have given shape and form to the finding of a critical space.

Key words: practical theology, tradition, experience, John Ruskin.

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## **Part 1: Contextualisation**

### ***Introduction***

I walked away from my first postgraduate supervision, my essay title metaphorically tucked under my arm: ‘The Book of Revelation is an ancient form of the critique of ideology. Discuss.’ I grabbed the first friend I met, and, bundling him into the nearest café, said, ‘I’ll buy you a coffee and a doughnut if you tell me what “ideology” means.’ That was many years before the earliest publication recorded in this critical appraisal was written; but the seeds of all my later work were in that essay. Here were history and present experience, the world of the Christian tradition and the contemporary world, theological understanding and understanding derived from ‘secular’ disciplines, the relationships within and between all these, and, above all, the way such dialectical relationships open up critical spaces from which to compare and critique human beliefs and human practices. ‘In the Book of Revelation’ I wrote, reflecting on the unveiling of earthly reality through the seer’s apocalyptic visions, ‘perhaps “heaven” is the spectacles through which we gain a new perspective on the realities of earth.’

I am a natural humanist, the circumstances of whose life meant engagement with evangelical Christianity and then with feminism. This is the foundation for the critical awareness which has led to my evolving understanding of ‘critical space’. I work in a constant dialectic between institutions, secular and sacred, between disciplines, and in managing a disparate and far-flung student constituency. The dialectic between humanism and Christian orthodoxy which initially engaged me moved on to the fundamental issue of biblical hermeneutics, the relationship between ancient text and modern context. My thinking on this has evolved; at one

point I had a strong suspicion of an authoritative text like the Bible and have moved towards a position which is no less critical but not as dualistic in its rejection of the positions with which I disagree. This evolution has been the result of learning from my context. I am not unusual in the way in which I have had to come to terms with the Bible and its role in modern society. What is unusual is the context in which I have done that, which has involved the necessity of a dialectical engagement on a daily basis – an engagement which has been at the heart of my practice and has conditioned my intellectual development and the contribution to knowledge on which this PhD submission rests.

I have been part of a pioneering experiment in ecumenical theological education, in which I have sought to ensure that this context conditions the way in which we go about our intellectual engagement. It has had a unique dimension for me, because of my joint appointment with the Cambridge Theological Federation (CTF) and Anglia Ruskin University (ARU). As the only theologian on the staff of ARU, it has been my task to broker a relationship between a group of Christian institutions and a secular university and set up and manage two degrees which recruit regionally, nationally, and internationally. So, the nature of criticism throughout has been articulated in the very process of this complex act of brokerage, between church and secular institution, and between different Christian traditions. More widely, I have been concerned to find ways of ensuring that practical theology is given the place it deserves within Theology and Religious Studies in the UK, not as some optional extra but as an essential ingredient of what it means to be theological in the modern world.

The serendipity of my employer taking as its name a famous public figure of the nineteenth century (John Ruskin) opened up the opportunity to see how this



remarkable intellectual could contribute to the understanding of the critical space which I was trying to articulate for myself within the complex network of relationships which is my context as a teacher and researcher, and which is at the heart of this critical appraisal. This opportunity thus made visible a contextually contoured ‘gap in knowledge’ which this submission for a PhD by Published Work seeks to fill (Trafford and Leshem 2008, pp.170-71).

The appraisal offers an examination of the contribution of my published work in the last ten years (the normal permitted timeframe). It seeks to demonstrate why the submitted publications constitute the basis for the award of a doctorate. The requirements for a PhD by Published Work are that the work should show ‘evidence of originality and independent critical judgement’, and should ‘[constitute] an addition to subject knowledge’ (Anglia Ruskin University 2012, Part B 8.3). This corpus lays out my original contribution in the field of practical theology, sets that contribution within the context of current questions and debates in the field, and gives evidence of independent critical judgement in relation to those questions, drawing out the ‘pattern of coherence between the publications’ (8.2). Because my contribution, in terms of knowledge and conceptualisation, to the field of practical theology is intimately tied to my professional practice, publications are included which demonstrate, disseminate, and reflect critically on that practice. The boundaries of possible selection are inevitably porous, since connections exist between selected work and other work before and after it.

I begin in Part 1 by contextualising the publications within my professional work and my longer intellectual journey. In Part 2, I conceptualise my contribution to knowledge, offering an extended reflection on the theme of ‘finding a critical

space: practical theology, history, and experience’, thus naming and mapping out the heart of my original contribution to the subject field. There follows a brief rationale for the inclusion of particular groups of works, and for the selection made within those groups. This part of the appraisal serves also to demonstrate the coherence of my work. In Part 3, ‘Commentary’, I engage in a focussed examination of the individual pieces of submitted work, in their groups, in order to demonstrate their qualifications which merit the award of a PhD by Published Work. I measure them against specific criteria which I have identified as offering objective and rigorous standards for scholarly work.

The material of this critical appraisal is inevitably self-reflective, but its style is also deliberately personal. ‘[S]tyle is organic to the person doing the writing’ (Badley 2009a, p.4; quoting Zinsser 2006, p.19). Badley’s emphasis, from Zinsser, on the personal transaction between the writer and the reader, on aliveness, warmth, and humanity, is predicated on his embracing of the philosophy of John Dewey. My approach to writing is determined by similar principles, likewise in line with my approach to teaching and to practical theology – a humanist approach which values most highly the experiential and intra-human transaction taking place. I have therefore chosen to ‘be myself’ in my style of communication, seeking an engaging, personal, informal, and lively style without thereby losing directness, clarity of expression, or precision of analysis.

### ***My professional context***

My contribution to knowledge has been intimately linked with my professional work, which has engendered an impulse for, and a coherence in, my research and

writing. Various aspects of this professional context will be drawn on as appropriate to the specific matter in hand throughout this critical appraisal.

The timeline which links professional practice and publications is as follows:

- 1995-2000 – directorship of MA Pastoral Theology (validated by ARU, delivered by CTF) and initial publications in adult education, in practical/pastoral theology, and in feminist theology;
- January 2000 – appointment as Director of Postgraduate Studies in Pastoral Theology with responsibility for the development of postgraduate practical and pastoral theology within ARU and CTF;
- 2000-2006 – directorship of MA Pastoral Theology, initial planning for Professional Doctorate in Practical Theology, national roles including editorship of the journals *Journal of Adult Theological Education* and *Practical Theology*, and committee membership of professional societies (*Association of Centres of Adult Theological Education*, and *British and Irish Association of Practical Theology* – Chair), publications in the area of ‘the dialectic of tradition and experience’ including a monograph, *Feminist perspectives in pastoral theology*, (2002);
- 2006 – launch of Professional Doctorate at ARU, through CTF;
- 2007-2009 – publications on the Professional Doctorate, initial research and seminar presentations on John Ruskin;
- 2010-2012 – publications on John Ruskin, election to *International Academy of Practical Theology*, ongoing directorship of MA and Professional Doctorate, with increasing internationalisation of the latter.

Of particular significance for this submission is the Professional Doctorate. Since 2003 I have been involved with an inter-university group<sup>1</sup> of leading practical theologians in the UK in the development of the Professional Doctorate in Practical Theology, at the heart of which stands the dialectic between the academy/theory and professional knowledge/practice. This development is part of a movement to recast the discipline of practical theology through the lens of action research. My publications reflect and explore the conceptual and practical implications of this project for practical theology, the pedagogical philosophy which underpins it, and its collaborative nature. My work over the last decade has exemplified how theory interacts with practice, and the product of that intellectual reflection takes shape in my writing and the provision of courses. This has enabled graduate students to engage on their course using a method analogous to the one I am myself using. The Professional Doctorate is both international and ecumenical in character. Two instances of this are the participation of the Margaret Beaufort Institute and its bursary programme, designed for capacity building in Roman Catholic institutions in East Africa through the doctorate, and the growing cohort of candidates in the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

My national and international contribution to the discipline has been recognised by the commission to write the article on practical theology in Britain for the recent benchmark international *Wiley-Blackwell companion to practical theology* (Bennett, 2011a). In 2010 I was elected to the *International Academy of Practical Theology* whose criteria for eligibility for membership include: '[i]ndividuals who have a distinguished record of publications with regard to the foundational issues

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<sup>1</sup> Currently Anglia Ruskin University and the Universities of Birmingham, Chester, Glasgow, and Manchester.

of practical theology and its subdisciplines or who have made other recognized significant contributions to practical theology’, and ‘[i]ndividuals with ... a certifiable demonstration of serious research and scholarly accomplishments’ (IAPT 2007, IV.C,D). In his letter nominating me Stephen Pattison wrote:

Zoe is a very distinguished British practical theologian ... . She has a fine, influential and lengthy publications record of books and sole-authored papers and has been inter alia the editor of the British-based Journal of Adult Education and of Practical Theology (founding editor). Zoe has designed and implemented the new Doctor of Practical Theology programme that is being rolled out in a number of British Universities. She must be regarded as one of the main British practical theologians of our time[.] (Pattison, 2010)

I present this information as evidence of my professional standing which is substantially connected to the recognised quality of my publications.

### ***My intellectual journey***

The intellectual journey within which this professional attainment is situated has involved a tension between finding or recognising ‘home’, and searching for a critical space by seeking to conceptualise and reflect on places in which I have found myself.

Three quite different places have been my intellectual and theological ‘home’. The first I found with my parents and in my schooldays – a humanist home of English and European literature, Latin and Greek classics, and a political and social morality which was residually Christian and explicitly socialist. The

second, I found in my student and early adult life in Anglican Evangelical Christianity. This was open to other Christian traditions and to social concerns, though very narrow in its intellectual understanding and human sympathies compared with the home I had known. Nevertheless, I embraced it with uncritical fervour until the twin ‘catastrophes’ of divorce and postgraduate study of theology turned it upside down. The third home I found at Westcott House where I worked from 1990 to 2000, a manifestly Christian place in which, however, intellectual and theological questions might be explored with openness.

But more than one home inevitably means the end of unquestioned ‘home’, and the beginning of finding a critical space. The view is always from somewhere and thus perspectival, and, crucially, is known to be such.

Tracing the effects of these ‘homes’ on my intellectual and professional journey, I notice the following: from my upbringing, a left-wing commitment and a sense of the importance of human experience and of my own judgement; from my study of Classics, a sense of historical perspective, of the value of the strange, and a deep humanism; from my involvement with Christianity, both a strong attachment to the Bible and an ineradicable though ambivalent connectedness to the church. All of these characterise my published work.

I have always been committed to an educational philosophy and practice which is radically student-centred, experiential, and humanistic. This was engendered in me by the experience of Socratic-style teaching at school, reinforced by reading Plato’s dialogues, and given a language and an educational framework by my reading of Paulo Freire and Carl Rogers (Freire, 1972; Rogers, 1969). Such a philosophical and practical commitment found a natural partner in practical

theology, with its dialectic or ‘critical conversation’ between experience, tradition, and personal voice. It also informed my embracing of feminist perspectives on my discipline, as I integrated these with my pedagogy (Bennett Moore, 1998a; 2002a), and developed a practical theological critique of Christian theology and church practice from the perspective of women’s experience (Bennett Moore, 2002b).

Within this critical conversation the question of the priority (or not) of the Bible is a massive bone of contention. I find myself wrestling at the centre of this discussion,<sup>2</sup> with my heart and history in a love of the Bible, but also committed to a thoroughgoing prioritisation of human experience and imagination. What I used to call the ‘integration’, but would now call the dialectic of the Bible and experience, and their capacity to afford each other a mutually critical space, is at the heart of my intellectual journey and its academic outworking. The importance of experience and context in relation to the Bible was initially raised for me academically in my MPhil studies (1988-90) with Christopher Rowland, in which I explored the relationship between the social context and the espoused theology of Johannes Weiss, and first discovered a historical example of the influence of context on the reading of the Bible (Humphries, 1990).

John Ruskin, whose work I explored by a contextual chance when our University took his name in 2005, has become for me a companion in that place of love for, and ambivalence towards, the Bible. As a man who knew much of the Bible by heart, read it alongside the social and aesthetic ‘texts’ of his contemporary society, and above all valued, practised, and wrote magnificently about, the art of

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<sup>2</sup> See *British and Irish Association of Practical Theology (BIAPT) Special Interest Group*, p.28; Bennett and Gowler, 2012; Bennett, forthcoming 2013a.

seeing well, he has become for me a paradigm of the practical theologian. His example has also projected me into an innovative way of doing practical theology, through the critical perspective offered by an historical lens (Bennett, 2011b).



## Part 2: Conceptualisation

### *Naming the contribution of my work*

*The tyranny of the text and the tyranny of experience* The discipline of practical theology is haunted by the Scylla and Charybdis of the tyranny of the text and the tyranny of experience. By ‘the text’ here I mean the Bible text itself, but also the T/tradition, the Creeds, the Confessions, the Magisterial pronouncements and the Liturgy(ies) which have shaped the myriad forms of Christian belief and practice. To what is accorded authority, how binding that authority is, and how much the role of interpretation is recognised, varies. This is not only about authority in the crude ‘imperative’ sense of the word; it is also about the shaping of identity. Alongside, or against, or in dialogue with, that ‘authoritative text’ is contemporary contextual experience. The foundational layer of this is the ‘codified’ experience which constitutes the texts themselves (Ruether 1983, p.12). Communities have reshaped interpretation of these texts in history through their experiences – from the various ‘Reformations’ to the abolition of slavery. Finally the experience of an individual is engaged in relation to the authority of the text – as a colleague of mine said in relation to the debate about same-sex partnerships, ‘what do you do when what you experience as grace someone else names as sin?’ In the dialectic between classic handed-down text and contextual experience it is not just a matter of the ‘correspondence of terms’, but of the ‘correspondence of relationships’ (Boff 1987, pp.143-150; Bennett 2007a, p.45), in which the critique of tradition within the experiences witnessed to in the text itself ‘correlates’ (Ruether, 1985; Bennett Moore 2002b, p.56) with the dialectic between tradition

and experience in the contemporary world. The use of terms such as correspondence and correlation, however, should not mask the sense in which this ‘dialectic’ is more about living with contraries than it is about integration.

Some forms of liberationist theology privilege the experience over the text, lest the text bind the spirit or mask the sinful workings of power. This is strongly expressed, for example, by Procter-Smith: ‘This commitment to women takes precedence over commitment to scriptural texts, recognizing that many scriptural texts have been and continue to be used to inhibit women’s emancipation’ (1993, p.314). Contemporary practical theology in the UK shares much of this perspective and has drawn extensively from it in its pedagogy (Bennett, 2011a). The classic ‘critical conversation’ sees the tradition, the situation, and the reflective self as partners in an equal dialogue (Pattison, 2000). The supposed dangers, however, of thus not according sufficient importance and authority to the text, or tradition, are pointed out from left and right even by theologians from positions sympathetic to pastoral and practical theology. Thus, Thiselton from an evangelical perspective is concerned that the interpretation of the text should not be subject to contemporary ‘power groups: the most militant, the most aggressive, the most manipulative’ (1992, p.603) and that the text should be allowed to exercise a metacritical function. Sweeney, from the Catholic tradition points out the contested position of the post-Vatican II orientation to human history and anthropology in which ‘[p]astoral theology, so reliant on social science methodologies to carry out its tasks, is especially vulnerable to the loss of its theological character’ (2010, p.19). These positions on the one hand ignore the function of human vested interests, power, and manipulation in the forging and delivery of what are claimed as ‘metacritical’ interpretations; and on the other

hand ignore the fact that theology has been dependent on human sciences from the beginning (see Bennett, 2007a, p.43).

These imagined twin terrors – of being heteronomously swamped and imaginatively crushed by the weight of tradition and text, or of floating free in the undisciplined waves of immediate experience which deceive the vain and empty heart – haunt a wide variety of human practices beyond the discipline of practical theology. At a recent conference on Ted Hughes as poet and critic that same tension between the immediate and the mediated, the imaginative and the boundaried, the creative and the critical, became clear to me.<sup>3</sup> These poles are, as Rowan Williams, expounding the writings of William Blake, has put it: ‘the Prolific and the Devourer – the productive energy from which life comes and the principle of separation or what we would call specificity, existence within bounds’ (Williams 2012, p.155). What is needed is to find a space in which both inherited tradition and contemporary experience may be both embraced and questioned, and the tyranny of either may be avoided.

*The dialectic of tradition and experience* A foundational (Freirean) image for adult education and practical theology alike comes from Hegel – that human beings should not be like counting house clerks, counting out other people’s money, ‘a wealth that passes through their hands without their retaining any of it, clerks who act only for others without acquiring any assets of their own’ (Hegel 1984, p.128; see Bennett Moore 1997/8). The dialectic between tradition and

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<sup>3</sup> Gregory Leadbetter, in a paper entitled “‘The snake in the oak’: Ted Hughes, Coleridge, and the contentions of reading’ given at The Ted Hughes Society Conference, Cambridge, 15.09.2012. The paper which I delivered collaboratively at this conference offered a further set of connections linking scholarship and experience.

experience is fundamentally significant for Christianity because it opens up questions of participation, of self-involvement, of responsibility, of investment, and of self-worth. How is the person within their communal and historical horizon of understanding (Gadamer, 1975) to engage and validate/have validated their experience?

Any 'dialectic' involves one in seeing from an alternative perspective. My work reveals a series of interlocking practical and intellectual commitments which enable perspectives from 'a different place'. These commitments are feminism, Christian ecumenism, the Bible in practical theology, and liberation theology, and I have chosen the publications in my first section to represent contributions in each of these areas. Each of these four foci of scholarship concerns possibilities for finding a critical space because difference, comparison, and critique are essential to them, as are models of correspondence and correlation.

It is more realistic to think of contemporary persons as set within a multiplicity of traditions than a single tradition; however, there are traditions which have historically shaped us. In the work of practical theology it is important, therefore, to enable reflexivity<sup>4</sup> in relation to our own positioning. I have developed in my work the concepts of suspicion and trust, of critique and commitment. These are not mutually exclusive poles, but invite trust in and witness to that which we hold dear and the taking of risk in relation to seeing ourselves and our commitments

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<sup>4</sup> The meanings given to the terms 'reflective' and 'reflexive' in published work are not always consistent. I use being 'reflective' to mean looking thoughtfully at something – usually at some length, with the benefit of hindsight, and with a critical eye. I use being 'reflexive' to mean specifically looking thoughtfully at one's own self – at what I am like, at how I see what is outside of myself, how I affect it, or how my seeing of it affects how I present it.

from the perspective of others (Bennett, 2004). This analogical or comparative way of gaining a critical space, and of being dialectical, is a more fruitful and nuanced alternative to the ‘debunking’ inherent in strong versions of a ‘hermeneutic of suspicion’, and partners well an attention to reflexivity. Such an attitude is beautifully encapsulated by Orsi in his image of the insider/outsider anthropologist ‘not going behind the curtain like Toto in Oz to uncloak the imposter’ but rather being like ‘a child glancing over his folded hands at his mother at prayer beside him’ (2005, 160).

*The Professional Doctorate: practical theology as action research and reflexivity*

The Professional Doctorate in Practical Theology has sought to locate practical theology at the doctoral research level within paradigms of action research and of reflexivity – in the academic world as well as in practice-bases of church and society. ‘Finding a critical space’ for practitioners and the organisations and communities to which they belong is a central aim.

My own pedagogical and theoretical stance has been sharpened and deepened through this work with the Professional Doctorate into a commitment to reflexivity as a vital route into finding a critical space. Let me take an example.<sup>5</sup>

A doctoral student who is a Black Pentecostal Pastor in his fifties, researching his role in the community in raising the educational attainment of Black boys, is producing an auto-ethnographic text as a symbolic resource. He wants to ‘do theological reflection’ within this, but is struggling as to how. Do I recommend that he finds themes about education in the Bible? Or identifies theological loci pertaining to incarnation? Or takes a liberationist theological methodology? Maybe – these would be standard moves in the discipline of theological

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<sup>5</sup> Cited with permission.

reflection. All have something to offer, but the problem is that they are, to varying degrees, extrinsic to his work. What is required is a systematic way of digging further into his experience in order to find a way of analysis and understanding. I comb his autobiographical text for clues. There are many. The most striking is his account of finding the Bible as an adult in his Pentecostal conversion, and being met in its message of calling and empowerment, after a lifetime of educational disappointment and humiliation, by a transformation of his whole life – self-confidence, joy, and fruitful practice. It is this with which he must work if he is to understand the connections between theology and his research topic. He must examine what he believes he knows about himself, gaining a critical purchase through the concrete stories and the theoretical perspectives of others.

An emphasis on the interconnectedness of theology and practice is found in a wide range of theological perspectives – systematic and liberationist; Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox (Volf and Bass, 2002; Boff, 1987; Rahner, 1974; Jillions, 2003). How this interconnectedness is conceived varies in different contexts. In the Professional Doctorate programme we argue that knowledge is generated through practical wisdom (Graham, 2002) and thus involves an ‘alternative philosophy of pedagogy’ (Bennett 2007b, p.76), and a possible subversion of the theoretical and practical *status quo* (Bennett 2009a, p.340-41). This opens up the critical space required by the dialectic of tradition and experience. In any professional doctorate practice/experience is the starting point, followed by a return to practice via theory. In a professional doctorate in practical theology the theory pole of this movement is made more complex because theory is informed by tradition in theology, and in relation to that tradition itself critical questions need to be raised.

*John Ruskin: history and analogy* In relation to the principle of leverage Archimedes said: ‘Give me a place to stand, and I will move the world.’ Analogously, we need distance to gain a critical perspective. Historical distance may offer an Archimedean point, although it should be stressed that within practical theology the place of critique is never outside the world or independent of context.

John Ruskin has provided such a ‘place to stand’ in my work. The Bible has for me, as for many others, been at the heart of the sometimes painful struggle between tradition and experience.<sup>6</sup> Ruskin has offered me an analogy in my exploration of how to manage the tension between love of the Bible and ambiguity about it. My work on the Bible Lectionary which he annotated in 1875, supplemented by unpublished material from his diaries of 1858/9, is the core of my original research contribution in this PhD submission. The hermeneutical strategies of reading Ruskin reading the Bible and his contemporary world have illuminated my understanding of reading text in dialogue with experience in my very different context (see Bennett, 2011c).

Ruskin has thus not only offered me a personal ‘place to stand’, he has also become an exemplar. I have offered an invitation through my research and publications to practical theologians to stand in similar historical ‘Archimedean points’, even though these might at first look as though they are outside the theological tradition (Bennett, 2011b). Appropriating Ruskin for practical theology in this way not only enables a critical space for doing practical theology through the lens of Ruskin, but also enables those familiar with him to take a fresh look at Ruskin through the eyes of practical theology: ‘like Barth you have

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<sup>6</sup> This is exemplified in Cameron et al., 2012, especially Chapter 5.

made Ruskin strange because you have made him a “man of the Bible” not a cultural critic’ (Rowland, 2012).

In the battle between the tyranny of textual or theoretical tradition, and the tyranny of experience, practical theology takes its starting point in the latter, preferring the tyranny of the ‘minute particular’<sup>7</sup> to the tyranny of constructed categories. What we learn from Ruskin is that ‘seeing’ minute particulars and what connects them may be a more valuable skill than ‘making connections’ and imposing systems. Pressed, the distinction may begin to blur, but three factors are essential to the quest to find a critical space: first, attentive observation of that which is the case; second, the ‘penetrative imagination’ to see into what underlies that which presents itself to us; and third, the creative imagination to lay things next to each other as we look at them, and so to provoke a form of metaphorical disclosure of truth. Comparison and analogy bring fresh insight and an understanding of hermeneutical horizons. Historical figures such as John Ruskin offer rich material for this work.

***Publications submitted: their ordering and division into three sections.***

My submitted publications demonstrate the three significant areas of research and interest in which my work has made a contribution to the scholarship and to the discipline of practical theology. The three areas are distinct but interrelated, with the dates of submitted publications roughly falling into chronological blocks: the dialectic of tradition and experience (2002-2007), the Professional Doctorate

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<sup>7</sup> A magnificent expression used extensively by William Blake, for example in *Jerusalem* (2008, p.205).



(2007-2009), John Ruskin and practical theology (2010-2011).<sup>8</sup> Their interrelationship is illustrated in Figure 1.

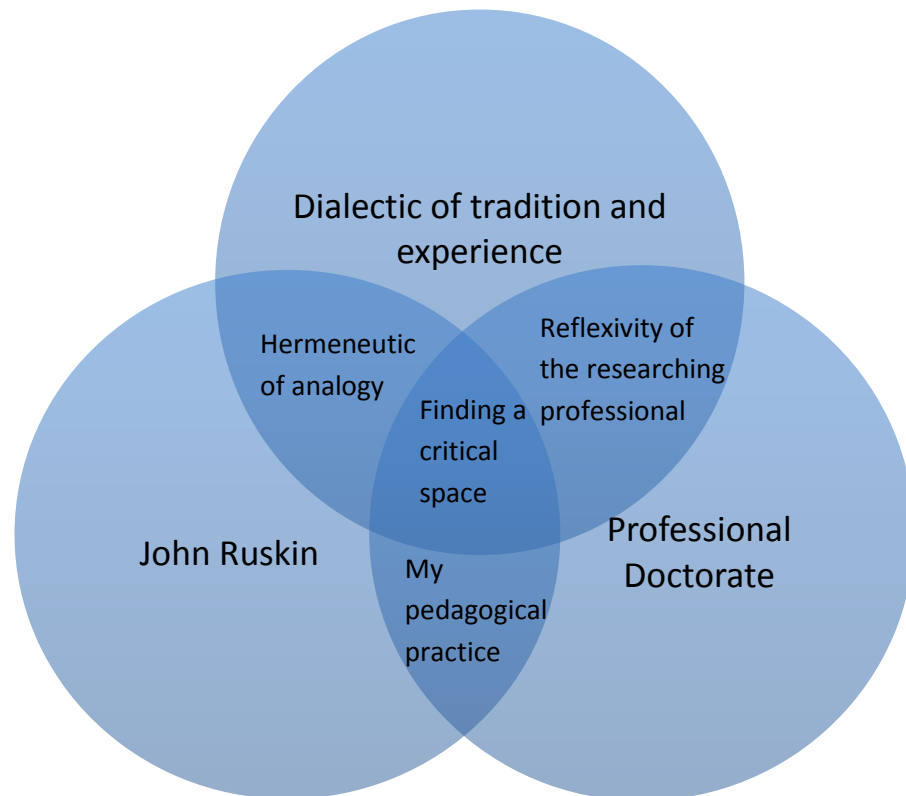


Figure 1. Conceptualising my academic contributions and their interrelationships

The three circles indicate the three main arenas of my work. First, my earliest work addressed the dialectic of tradition and experience without as yet any development through the Professional Doctorate or consideration of Ruskin. Second, the formative days of the Professional Doctorate inspired publications

<sup>8</sup> Copies of the published works submitted comprise Appendix 1. There is a coversheet listing the works, three of which are presented as separate items. The works are numbered, and correspond to the order of the sections identified in this critical appraisal.

which elucidated and evaluated this new programme. Third, the works on Ruskin, particularly the article in the *International Journal of Practical Theology* and the Ruskin Lecture, are the culmination of my submission and contribution to knowledge, offering original research on Ruskin's annotations of texts and on notes in his diary, and using this both to develop understanding of Ruskin and to forge new ways of engaging in practical theology.

What do the overlapping segments add and how are they best described? The dialectic of tradition and experience overlaps with the Professional Doctorate in the ecumenical educational 'community of practice' which shapes my research and writing (Wenger, 1998). Understanding the dynamics of the 'researching professional' in practical theology, and particularly the reflexivity called for in this process, introduced new dimensions to my work on the dialectic of tradition and experience.

The work on John Ruskin enables me to develop my own unique contribution to the discussion of the dialectic of tradition and experience. It opens up the hermeneutic of analogy involved both through my historical work and through the example of Ruskin's own practice.

The segment where the Professional Doctorate and Ruskin overlap represents my constructive project, my 'Zig-Zaggy garden' (Bennett 2011b, p.201-02), bringing research and pedagogy together in an interpretation of the past which develops the pedagogy of the present.

The central segment in which the dialectic of tradition and experience, the Professional Doctorate, and John Ruskin overlap represents their threefold coinherence in the search for critical space. Consideration of the dialectic of

tradition and experience demonstrates in theory that such a critical space is needed; analysis of the pedagogy of the Professional Doctorate indicates in practice that it is required. By means of an historical comparison, my work on John Ruskin contributes to how it might be possible to find this kind of critical space. My work represents a new departure in practical theology where such historical analogies have not been widely used.

### **Part 3: Commentary**

#### ***Introduction: criteria against which the published works will be evaluated***

In order to evaluate whether the works I am submitting meet the criteria for a doctorate, I shall refer to a Carnegie Foundation report (Glassick, Huber and Maeroff, 1997; see Badley 2009b, pp.338-39) which discusses commonly expected '[s]tandards of [s]cholarly [w]ork' (pp.22-36; see my Appendix 2).

Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff's categories can be grouped into four areas. The first pertains to origins and context; this includes the questions grouped under 'clear goals' and 'adequate preparation'. A second is 'appropriate methods' and 'effective presentation'. These criteria refer to qualities of methodological rigour and presentational vigour in the published materials. A third is that of influence in the work's intended audience: 'significant results' and further 'effective presentation'. The fourth area, 'reflective critique', refers to critique contained within the published materials themselves (more normally found within social sciences methodologies), to critique implied by the development of work over a stated period, and to critique made retrospectively as in this critical appraisal.

I add a further explicit category to Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff's list – that of the development of the scholar's own voice. A sign of 'doctorateness' is that the candidate is able to make a transition to the post-doctoral scholarly community (Trafford and Leshem 2008, p.136; pp.188-89). A growing well-placed confidence in my own academic voice gives evidence that I inhabit that community comfortably.

The commentary will take the work grouped into the areas named on pp.18-19. In this way I will be able to evaluate the work in question within a larger context and show how each section and each work within the section build into the whole of my ‘thesis’, as well as offering detailed analysis of specific works. I am the sole author of all of the works submitted, with two exceptions. In these cases the nature of the collaboration is demonstrated in the commentary and the equality of contribution is attested to in letters from my collaborators (Appendices 3 and 4.)

### ***The dialectic of tradition and experience***

I offer five items in this section of which *Introducing feminist perspectives on pastoral theology* (Bennett Moore, 2002b) stands chronologically at the beginning of my submitted works. The function, therefore, of this monograph within my submission is to lay out in detail, both explicitly in its content and implicitly in its method, some of the submission’s key themes – for example, the priority of practice, the struggle with the Bible and tradition, ideological distortion in uncritical religion, and reflexivity.

There is an integral connection between this book and my previous publications (see Appendix 5). They arose from my involvement with practical and feminist theology, and in particular my teaching of these. *Introducing feminist perspectives on pastoral theology* is rooted in my teaching of the MA module on this topic. It provides a microcosm of the way three elements are intertwined: my practice of teaching, and reflection on it; the reflective practice which my students are engaged on in their learning with me; and my conception of what it means to do practical theology. These elements have all contributed to shaping my submitted publications. This is clear in the book itself, and is echoed in the reviews: ‘The

author is an educator, and this shows on every page of her book' (Byrne, 2003, p.23). My publications, therefore, are rooted not only in my practice of education, but in the ecclesial and social contexts which the learners brought into the class as material for reflection. This addresses Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff's requirements under 'goals' and 'preparation'.

Methodologically the work embraces the priority of practice in feminist and practical theology, and consistently works with this. For example, Chapter 2 lays out the issue of violence, as a starting point for the book, both as a locus of necessary reflection for feminist practical theology on concrete realities and practices, *and* as a conceptual tool – 'an interpretative key for pastoral reflection, a lens through which to analyse the patriarchal nature of society and of the church' (Bennett Moore 2002b, p.32).<sup>9</sup> Chapter 7 deals with 'women and pastoral care' via an extended reflection, theorizing and opening up to wider stories, 'my own experience as a giver and receiver of pastoral care' (p.122). One reviewer found this chapter 'particularly moving': 'here [the author] speaks courageously and honestly in the first person ... subjecting her own lived experience to theological analysis' (Slee 2004, p.234). Methods appropriate to the goals and context are sustained rigorously throughout the work. These are: taking a starting point in practice and concrete reality; self-involvement; and the theorising of both of these within feminist approaches.

The book steers a course between treatments of feminist pastoral care which at the time had quite recently appeared (for example in the UK Graham and Halsey, 1993; in the USA Stevenson-Moessner, 1996) and treatments of feminist theology in the context of feminist theory (Graham, 1999; Hogan, 1995), asserting, perhaps

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<sup>9</sup> See Loades' review (2005, p.411).

against the run of British thinking (Daggers, 2002), that theology is at the heart of a feminist approach to practical Christian religion, ‘insisting, with Judith Plaskow, that “the right questions are theological” ’ (Graham 2003, p.124).

It was at the time, and has continued to be, valued internationally as a text which set out competently and comprehensively the current state of feminist theology – ‘a world-class collection’ and ‘an international archive’ (Stevenson-Moessner 2005, p.335). The reviews of the book make clear its contribution to the field in terms of a presentation of contemporary issues in feminist pastoral theology and the state of the debate at the time. Significantly for this thesis it also demonstrates a sustained engagement with the struggle between tradition and experience. Later conversations have confirmed the contribution of the book to feminist pastoral and practical theology at an international level. For example, Professor Emmanuel Lartey of Emory University has placed the book as required reading for his doctoral class on race, gender, class, and spirituality for the last six years, because:

[i]t is highly readable, theologically deconstructive and reconstructive, and critically based in experience, especially women’s experience globally in a world marked by violence (upon which the text reflects admirably) and anthropology (the images of humanity by which we live and which are constantly being portrayed through the media)[.] (Lartey, 2012)

Significantly for my later work the chapter on the Bible has been recently cited to indicate my place among scholars of practical theology who struggle seriously with the Bible rather than letting the tension of the dialectic rest on the sideline (Cartledge, forthcoming).

The book thus meets Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff's criteria of 'effective presentation' to its intended audience and of 'significant results', in part through 'adequate preparation' in which understanding is shown of existing scholarship in the field and the necessary resources are brought together, and in part through 'appropriate methods' of reflection and analysis.

The publication of this book marked the beginning of the development of my own creative voice. Some reviewers picked up on the rich and fruitful seam in the book of my personal voice bringing out something new and creative from my own thinking and experience, but others indicated that it was still a small voice – '*all the time I was waiting for more* from this original and balanced author, because her answers to the questions she poses ... are lucid and intelligent' (Byrne, 2003, p.24 my italics). It was for me a tussle to find that which is life-giving in reality without letting go of either my roots or my new discoveries (Dowler, 2003). At the end of her review Graham (2003, p.124) wrote:

Those concerned to look ahead to the *next* ten years, however, perhaps to consider further how experience and tradition can be harnessed in guiding effective and faithful Christian practice – and what, if anything, institutional religion may have to offer to the process – may have to read a little further.

This critical appraisal reviews the published work over the last ten years, which allows the reader to 'read a little further', and it contributes to Graham's desire for a more predictive dimension in the work than was offered in the feminism book. It demonstrates how my own distinct contribution has developed, and how I have



‘add[ed] consequentially to the field’ in relation to precisely these issues (Glassick, Huber and Maeroff, 1997).

The remaining four works in this section all address issues around critical space in practical theology. They belong in an intellectual and pedagogical nexus, in continuity with the origins of *Feminist perspectives*. That nexus includes:

- my teaching and curriculum development in the Cambridge Theological Federation, and also my leadership within that developing ecumenical organisation, including a year as President, and my initiative in organising an international conference entitled ‘Learning confidence in difference: teaching theology in an ecumenical context’;
- my involvement with the development of the *British and Irish Association of Practical Theology* (BIAPT), including three years as Chair, during which time the theory/practice discussion was centre-stage as we tried to find a way forward in the tension between experience and tradition, between practitioners and academics – a way which was eventually substantially found, and the situation transformed, through the inauguration and growth of the Professional Doctorate in Practical Theology;
- my consecutive editorships of the *Journal of Adult Theological Education* (JATE) and *Practical Theology*, bringing these to birth from the *British Journal of Theological Education* and *Contact* respectively, which immersed me in national and international networks of practitioners and academics dealing with cutting edge questions in those overlapping fields, the former including annual attendance at the *Religious Education*

*Association* in North America and membership of its ‘adult education’ caucus.

These collaborative contexts enabled me to know what was realistic and achievable and, consequently, to identify important questions in the field, ‘clear goals’ (Glassick, Huber and Maeroff, 1997). They also facilitated ‘adequate preparation’ in terms of developing skills and drawing on scholarship, as well as identifying and accessing resources.

‘Significant results’ are defined by Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff in terms of ‘add[ing] consequentially to the field’ and ‘open[ing] additional areas for further exploration’. They identify the importance of ‘appropriate forums’ for communicating work to ‘intended audiences’ with ‘clarity and integrity’. The integrity of my work is underwritten by my engagement in a community of practice, or rather an interlocking series of such communities, which provide the intended audiences. I offer two examples of recognition of this. The Editorial Board of *Contact* commended *Incorrigible plurality* (Bennett, 2004) for its contribution to ecumenical education – Helen Cameron described it warmly as a ‘helpful staff development tool’ which ‘clarified [her] thinking’ as an experienced academic and practitioner in the field (Cameron, 2012). Second, “‘Action is the life of all’: New Testament theology and practical theology’ (Rowland and Bennett, 2006) was published in a Festschrift for Robert Morgan. Paul Ballard asked us to provide a version of this chapter for his guest-edited issue of *Contact* in order that it would reach a wider audience (Bennett and Rowland, 2006). This particular line of scholarship has now issued in my involvement and consultative role in the BIAPT Special Interest Group on the Bible and Practical Theology, which has run a colloquium (May 2011) and is disseminating its ongoing work.

In terms of both methodology and presentation the works offer variety. *Incorrigible plurality* is a structured reflection on practice, common in practical and pastoral theology and evident from my earliest publications (Bennett Moore, 1998b). It offers an analysis of the presentation in an ecumenical classroom of an Anglican student's experience of being asked to allow Muslim godparents, and includes the responses of the Orthodox participants in that class. In the light of relevant literature, themes are drawn out and examined, enabling renewed practice. Practice is thus able to offer hard-edged challenges to theory. It is a method related to the so-called 'pastoral cycle' which forms the bedrock of our pedagogy in the field in the Cambridge Theological Federation, right up to doctoral level (Bennett 2009a, pp.337-38; Leach, 2010). 'Ecumenical theological education as a practice of peace' (Bennett, 2006) by a similar methodology draws on the range of practices and the deliberations of an international gathered community, to test and develop further the theme of witness and risk which I had initially offered in *Incorrigible plurality*.

"'Action is the life of all': New Testament theology and practical theology', written with Christopher Rowland (Rowland and Bennett, 2006), explored an interdisciplinary method between New Testament studies and practical theology. We had previously collaborated on an essay for an earlier volume (Bennett and Rowland, 2005), and our work had been noted for the contribution it made:

essays by Bartholomew and by Bennett and Rowland are without doubt the most successful at bringing together the concerns of both biblical and pastoral disciplines. .... Bennett and Rowland consistently attend to the pastoral impact of the modes of reading they describe.' (Mein 2006, p.54)

So we continued with the conversation. The methodology is analogical and historical. From this collaboration I learned that methods of analogy and comparison, used in practical theology to lay alongside one another the realities of contemporary experience and the resources of the Christian tradition, could be extended fruitfully, first into intra-biblical work – examining the engagement between tradition and experience which is already going on in the biblical text – and, second, into historical analogies. These two insights have been vital for my later work, not least for my recent work on Ruskin, which itself has many analogies to the way in which one might engage with another past corpus of writings like the Bible.

“‘Action is the life of all’”: the praxis-based epistemology of liberation theology’ (Bennett, 2007a) has direct continuity with this work with Christopher Rowland, as the title, derived from Gerrard Winstanley (1609-1676), indicates (Corns, Hughes and Loewenstein 2009, vol.2, p.80). The methodology of this work was to dig analytically down into a foundational text of liberation theology, Clodovis Boff’s *Theology and praxis* (1987) – a text capable of illuminating significant features of the epistemological relationship between theory and practice so essential to practical theology. The essay exposed a conservatism which had often been ignored in Boff’s work, which fascinatingly came to the surface just after my piece was published in his public controversy with his brother Leonardo in 2008 (Magister, 2008). Through consideration of critical readings of Boff my work moved towards a construction of an epistemology of praxis, via the practices of witness and risk which I had identified in *Incorrigible plurality* and expounded in ‘Ecumenical theological education as practice of peace’. Furthermore, Boff’s discussion, particularly of the ‘correspondence of

relationships', helped me to get a clear theoretical framework for my analogical method as applied to the Bible and to contextual theology more generally.

These different methodologies, used rigorously and applied creatively, contribute to 'finding a critical space'. Reflecting on this period in my work (2002-2007) I see a distinctive voice which is slowly emerging from a community of practice and scholarship (see Murray 2005, p.61; p.93). Such a voice has its own areas of specialism, in which it may have solos or perhaps duets. Throughout this period, building on earlier work, my solos began to develop around pedagogy, feminism, biblical hermeneutics, ecumenism, and the understanding of practice. I could not at this time have named the question behind all this as one of finding a critical space, although it was taking shape as a dialectic of tradition and experience and I was just beginning to see the contribution of historical study in that search. I was becoming suspicious of the word 'suspicion' ('hermeneutics of') – shifting from grateful embrace of this term to cautious use, wanting to move to something warmer, less confrontational and exclusive, and more nuanced. My voice was heard in leadership of practice and scholarly endeavour; its presentational form in published work was already clear and coherent, and developing in consistency and confidence.

### ***The Professional Doctorate***

This section contains three pieces of work, published in the second, third and fourth years of the doctoral programme (2007-2009), which laid out its foundational thinking and process, and began to analyse and evaluate its significance and progress. They should be viewed as a group in terms of the contribution they make as they have some inevitable overlap in their framing

material although each draws out fresh conceptual and reflective themes. The Professional Doctorate project, now in its seventh year, is ripe for a further, much deeper, and more extensive consideration. Such a project, focussed on the nature and place of research in practical theology, with an international perspective, is in hand with Oxford University Press as a collaboration led by Stephen Pattison.<sup>10</sup>

The goals and preparation of these works are found in the contexts of their writing, first in the collaborative work in developing and initially delivering the Professional Doctorate, and second in projects which embedded the pedagogical innovations with which we were involved in the wider subject field and community of practice. ‘Evaluating the feasibility of a cross-institutional doctorate in practical theology’ (Bennett, 2007b) was the fruit of a collaborative project funded through the Higher Education Academy (HEA) Subject Centre for Philosophy and Religious Studies and published in their journal, *Discourse* as an initial means of dissemination. ‘The professional doctorate in practical theology: developing the researching professional in practical theology in higher education’ (Bennett and Graham, 2008), published in *JATE*, also has its context and origin in an HEA project, a conference ‘Teaching practical theology in HE’ in March 2007 at Oxford Brookes University jointly hosted by NoATE (Network of Adult Theological Educators), BIAPT, and the HEA, when the Professional Doctorate had nearly completed its first year. Again this work was located in, and widely disseminated to, the adult theological education and practical theology communities nationally. In this article Elaine Graham, my counterpart programme director then at the University of Manchester, and I began to conceptualise the

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<sup>10</sup> Stephen Pattison, Elaine Graham and I gave a preliminary paper at the *International Academy of Practical Theology* meeting in Amsterdam in July 2011.

contribution our programme was making to wider disciplinary and pedagogical contexts. Developing from this, ‘Theology and the researching professional: the professional doctorate in practical theology’ (Bennett, 2009a), was commissioned by the editor of *Theology* for an issue on theological education, in order to disseminate what he believed was an innovative development within practical theology of interest to the wider field of theology.

Methodologically these papers constitute reflection on ongoing practice. They involve a gathering of historical, narrative, comparative, and conceptualising material in the light of practice. A high proportion of my work presented in this section is a narrative based on practice which involves analysis in its telling – through selection of material, contextualisation, conceptualisation, and evaluation. The funding of the initial collaborative project and the publication of its results by the HEA testify to the rigour and significance which the work was judged to display.

In terms of significant results, the works taken together offer a reflective analysis of the genesis of a programme which was innovative in two quite different ways. First, it was the first ‘professional doctorate’ in practical theology not only in the UK but internationally. The significant distinctions between this and similar types of programme are carefully drawn (Bennett 2009a, p.336). The placing of a branch of theology within this niche was a creative act whose consequences are still unfolding (Bennett and Graham 2008, pp.46-48). Second, it was a collaborative venture, involving several universities. This work on the Professional Doctorate has ‘add[ed] consequentially to the field’ and ‘open[ed] additional areas for exploration’ (Glassick, Huber and Maeroff, 1997). The programme itself and its presentation in the public domain have been a significant

part of the transformation which has been seen over the last few years in the journal *Practical Theology* and in BIAPT. This is evidenced by the quality and quantity of participation, the drawing together of practical and theoretical work, and the debate in the constituency over appropriate pedagogy and practice at doctoral level, not least in the realm of the relationship between experience and theory.

Writing about the Professional Doctorate enhanced the use of my authorial and authoritative voice because the material presented stemmed from the particulars of my own experience – experience which involves an active engagement with the stubborn realities of innovation and pedagogy. Although the Professional Doctorate will benefit from a more mature analysis written at a later stage in its life – this early work is full of the enthusiasms of new discoveries – nevertheless, rough-edged realities and the need for collaboration, not least with institutions of higher education, as well as the context of critical discussion for dissemination to wider theological and educational audiences, sustained a good level of evaluative reflection within my authorial voice.

### ***John Ruskin***

The material on Ruskin has two distinct thrusts. The primary one is centred in practical theology, and is laid out in the article “‘To see fearlessly, pitifully’: what does John Ruskin have to offer to practical theology?” (Bennett, 2011b). Here I have presented the central contribution my research makes in the most prestigious journal in the field internationally. The peer reviewer’s comments (Appendix 6) state that this is an ‘original contribution’ which is ‘unusual and distinctive’, will be of interest to practical theologians involved in interdisciplinary work, and



‘usefully expands the debate within the discipline concerning the nature of “texts” that serve as sources for practical theological hermeneutics’. My contribution to a second area, Ruskin studies, was recognised by the invitation to deliver the annual Guild of St George Ruskin Lecture 2011, published as *The true use of faith* (Bennett, 2011d). Of this lecture and publication, which he describes as ‘elegantly delivered and ... readable on the page’, Clive Wilmer, the Master of the Guild and an internationally prominent Ruskin scholar, has written, ‘I am grateful to Zoë Bennett for getting us to admit, after too long, that there is indeed an elephant in our room and for showing us why we need to talk about it’ (Wilmer 2012, p.14). Thus he pinpoints what I consider my central contribution to Ruskin studies, which is that John Ruskin’s shaping by the Bible, and use of the Bible in his own understanding and in his public work, are significant and should be addressed by scholarly work in the field.

Of the other three works submitted in this section, ‘Ruskin, the Bible and the death of Rose La Touche: a “torn manuscript of the human soul”’ (Bennett, 2011e) makes public the original research which was the genesis of my work. The essay addresses Ruskin’s annotations on a medieval Gospel Lectionary, laying out the key material found in this and also making an initial analysis of Ruskin’s biblical hermeneutical strategies. These categories as applied to Ruskin were entirely original to me and derived from the primary material. They have been tested out during seminars in Cambridge, Oxford, Liverpool, Dunedin (New Zealand), BIAPT and IAPT conferences, and at the Ruskin Seminar in Lancaster, in engagement with a wide range of practical theologians and Ruskin scholars. They have been refined and expanded, but their core has stood the test of time and has opened up fruitful avenues of discussion and work.

“‘A fact full of power, or a dream full of meaning’?: the influence of religion and the Bible on Ruskin’s social, political and economic critique’ (Bennett, 2010) was also a foundational paper, being one of a pair which introduced my work to Ruskin scholars (with Bennett, 2009b).<sup>11</sup> In this essay I added to my original work on the lectionary through consideration of Ruskin’s unpublished diary material from the period of his ‘turn to the human’. This material enabled me to see and conceptualise more of how Ruskin’s struggle with the Bible in his life was related complexly to his social critique. This understanding is central both to my reading of Ruskin as a ‘man of the Bible’ and to my engagement with him in practical theology.

I offer “‘There is no wealth but life’: John Ruskin and public theology’ (Bennett, 2011c) as an example of a range of material published as my work on Ruskin built up from these beginnings, integrating the Ruskin research with the interests of practical theology.<sup>12</sup> This piece uses an historical figure to analyse the finding of critical space in public theology, exploring the significance of Ruskin’s biography, biblical interpretation, capacity to ‘tell’ as well as to ‘see’, and commitment to human flourishing connected at its heart with his Christian faith.

In writing about Ruskin I discovered a new dimension to my academic voice. Here I found I had something to contribute which was being said by no one else. It was based on textual research identifiably my own, conceptualised and thus ‘authorised’ by myself, tested increasingly in a range of academic communities, and brought into relationship with my other academic and practical project – the

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<sup>11</sup> Through the *Ruskin Review and Bulletin*.

<sup>12</sup> See also ‘Creation Made Image and Image Made Word: John Ruskin on JMW Turner’s ‘Snow Storm’ (Bennett, 2011f) and “‘There is no other light than this by which they can see each other’s faces and live’”: John Ruskin and the Bible’ (Bennett, forthcoming 2013b).

growth and conceptualising of practical theology within the Professional Doctorate. This finding of voice – of confidence, clarity in conceptualisation and creativity – is of course experienced subjectively; but readers, from students to peer reviewers to a professional writing coach, have all remarked on it.

The work on Ruskin employed a range of ‘appropriate methods’ (Glassick, Huber and Maeroff, 1997), and involved interdisciplinarity between Ruskin studies and practical theology. The foundation of the work was to pose an overarching research question, ‘what, if any, usefulness might the life and work of John Ruskin have for practical theology?’, from which further research questions were refined and developed as further fields of ‘ignorance’ became ‘motivating force[s]’ (Firestein, 2012, p.56). Initially skills of detective work were required, identifying, through a trail to find the whereabouts of Ruskin’s annotated manuscripts and a parallel trail of conversations with key scholars, what areas and what materials might contribute to answering my question. At this stage I experienced the researcher’s combination of finding out things which I had set myself as goals, and unanticipated discoveries. I employed a set of historical/contextualising, linguistic, and textual skills to make sense of the manuscripts and diaries (this included drawing on my Classical background which had been a significant part of my academic life), and of critical skills of conceptualising and making creative connections with the discipline of practical theology. Finally throughout I used a hermeneutical approach – identifiable from that first ‘typology’ of Ruskin’s hermeneutic strategy to the rooting of the Ruskin discoveries in the hermeneutical tradition of practical theology and its contemporary practical outworkings.

By way of reflective critique I offer two further thoughts. First, how I stumbled upon John Ruskin is not incidental to the contribution my research makes. It happened because my university took his name. That contextualisation was dramatically embodied in 2008 when the actor Paul O’Keeffe, at my suggestion, recreated in nearby Zion Baptist Church Ruskin’s inaugural lecture for the founding of Anglia Ruskin University’s School of Art, 150 years previously. My work on Ruskin has become my key research contribution related to my ongoing quest to understand the dialectic of tradition and experience, of theory and practice, in practical theology, and to embed that in a practical tradition and a specific doctoral programme, validated by the very same institution which took Ruskin’s name. My research is biographically and organically connected to my context, and precisely such a biographic and organic connection is a key conceptualisation of my research.

Second, connections are being made with Ruskin’s work by other contemporary theologians. For example McGrath uses Ruskin’s account of sight and access to the transcendent through the perception of the natural world in constructing his ‘new vision for natural theology’ (2008); Milbank finds appeal in Ruskin’s holistic, religiously based, pre-Marxist form of socialism, with its romantic and medieval associations and its alleged combination of the empirical and the ‘Platonic’ (2009: x); Gorringer (2011) in his writing on economics, the built environment, and the common good draws on Ruskin’s discussions of human flourishing and of its relationship to architecture. In one sense my project takes its place alongside these in building a picture of a man whose work is of significance in various ways for theology.

Beyond this, however, my work integrates the study of Ruskin with the core concepts of practical theology, and furthermore constitutes research on Ruskin himself and hence contributes to, as well as draws on, an understanding of Ruskin. I have made a contribution within Ruskin conferences and publications as well as within the discipline of practical theology. My understanding of Ruskin's significance for practical theology contributes to the understanding and development of practical theology as an analogical and hermeneutical discipline and also to practical pedagogy within that discipline. It has been my work in Ruskin studies which has enabled me to make an original contribution to the conceptualisation and the practice of finding a critical space in the discipline of practical theology. Inevitably such work has opened up further possible areas of research, such as a detailed study of all Ruskin's annotations on biblical material, which I have not been able to pursue – yet.

## Conclusion

The Anglia Ruskin Research Degree regulations (2012, Part B 7.1 b) require that the critical appraisal should have established a range of qualities in the published work submitted. These qualities dovetail with the criteria set out by Glassick, Huber, and Mearoff, and cover appropriate goals and methodologies, originality, and contribution to knowledge. The appraisal itself should be critically reflective, and it should establish the interrelationships and coherence of the totality of the works presented, both in terms of their themes and their methodologies; furthermore it should contextualise the work within the candidate's curriculum vitae. This critical appraisal has sought to address all of these requirements.

The substantial question which gives coherence to this submitted body of work is the search for a critical space within experience and tradition from which to do the work of practical theology, and the contribution which an historical perspective, as exemplified in my work on John Ruskin, may offer to this. It is about having 'a place to stand', or to change the metaphor, spectacles through which to look. Archimedes' place from which to lever the globe, however, or 'heaven' as the spectacles from which to view the earth, may superficially suggest that critical space as being above and beyond this world. On the contrary, my work locates the critical space on offer to us in the messy history and experience of human beings – and to be found in the examination of a particular historical figure (John Ruskin) and in the self-critical exploration of our own academic context (CTF and ARU) and practices (the Professional Doctorate).

## **Reflection**

Writing this critical appraisal I have thought often of Caravaggio's painting of Narcissus: the luminous boy looking with yearning at the reflection which only just comes into focus; the danger of what he is doing and the compelling delight of it. Such 'narcissism' has its dangers, not least the difficulties of seeing that which is ugly, inconsistent, inadequate, or painful to know. It requires a certain distance to overcome the fuzziness, though the boy tries to get a clearer picture simply by coming ever nearer. Narcissus is poised on the brink of falling into the water, becoming one with his own reflection, fatally losing forever any critical space between himself and what he sees.

Despite its dangers, this process of reflecting on my own work over the last ten years has been a delight. A picture has begun to come into focus which I had never seen in any kind of fullness before. The process of reflection has in itself been a means of finding a critical space, giving me a place to stand as I move into the next ten years' work.

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## **Finding a critical space: practical theology, history, and experience.**

### **List of publications submitted for PhD by Published Work, Zoë Bennett**

*These are numbered and listed by section, with comment on the standing of the journals in which they were published, where appropriate.<sup>1</sup>*

#### *The dialectic of tradition and experience*

1. Bennett Moore, Z., 2002. *Introducing feminist perspectives on pastoral theology*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press. (Cleveland, USA: The Pilgrim Press, 2003).
2. Bennett, Z., 2004. *Incorrigible plurality: teaching pastoral theology in an ecumenical context*. Contact Pastoral Monograph, No. 14.<sup>2</sup>
3. Bennett, Z., 2006. Ecumenical theological education as a practice of peace. *Religious Education*, 101.3, pp.331-46.<sup>3</sup>
4. Rowland, C. and Bennett, Z., 2006. 'Action is the life of all': New Testament theology and practical theology. In: C. Rowland and C. Tuckett, eds. 2006. *The nature of New Testament theology*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp.186-206.
5. Bennett, Z., 2007. 'Action is the life of All': the Praxis-based Epistemology of Liberation Theology. In C. Rowland, ed. 2007. *Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.39-54.

#### *The Professional Doctorate*

6. Bennett, Z., 2007. Evaluating the feasibility of a cross-institutional professional doctorate in practical theology: a report. *Discourse*, The Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies, 6.2, pp. 55-77. Also available at:  
<http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/subjects/prs/PrsDiscourse/14.pdf>

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<sup>1</sup>Please note these are not numbered to correspond with the list cited in the application (Regulation 7.1.c) since I have, on the instructions of the *prima facie* case Panel, reduced that number. It is the case, however, that no additional works have been included.

<sup>2</sup>15000 word monographs published annually in connection with the journal *Contact* (UK based, now *Practical Theology*). Proposals submitted to the Editorial Board and chosen in competition.

<sup>3</sup> Peer reviewed international journal.

7. Bennett, Z. and Graham, E., 2008. The professional doctorate in practical theology: developing the researching professional in practical theology in higher education. *Journal of Adult Theological Education*, 5.1, pp.33-51.<sup>4</sup>
8. Bennett, Z., 2009. Theology and the researching professional: the professional doctorate in practical theology. *Theology*, CXII.869, pp.333-43.<sup>5</sup>

### *John Ruskin*

9. Bennett, Z., 2010. 'A fact full of power, or a dream full of meaning'? the influence of religion and the Bible on Ruskin's social, political and economic critique. *Ruskin Review and Bulletin*, 6.2, pp.35-47.<sup>6</sup>
10. Bennett, Z., 2011. 'To see fearlessly, pitifully': what does John Ruskin have to offer to practical theology? *International Journal of Practical Theology*, 14.2, pp.189-203.<sup>7</sup>
11. Bennett, Z., 2011. 'There is no wealth but life': John Ruskin and public theology. In: M. Higon, J. Law and C. Rowland, eds. 2011. *Theology and human flourishing: essays in honour of Timothy J. Gorringer*. Eugene, OR.: Wipf and Stock, pp.127-40.
12. Bennett, Z., 2011. *The true use of faith*. The Ruskin Lecture 2011. Isle of Wight: The Guild of St George.<sup>8</sup>
13. Bennett, Z., 2011. Ruskin, the Bible and the death of Rose La Touche: a 'torn manuscript of the human soul'. In: M. Lieb, E. Mason and J. Roberts, eds. 2011. *The Oxford handbook of reception history of the Bible*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.576-89.

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<sup>4</sup> Peer reviewed journal published in the UK with international Board, editorial team and contributors.

<sup>5</sup> Peer reviewed national UK journal.

<sup>6</sup> Journal published in house by the Ruskin Library and Research Centre, University of Lancaster.

<sup>7</sup> Peer reviewed international journal.

<sup>8</sup> Lecture given by invitation after submission of proposal. Publication then guaranteed.